Petersen

Our Postman Works Diligently, and Here's What He Brings Us

Cards, letters, and other memorable memoranda from readers:

PAUL W. BAILEY: Certainly as a free citizen, you can *indulge yourself in the foibles, superstitions, and inanities* that would seem to be a consequence of an overblown obsession with television. But please do not presume to lend your support [for whatever it is worth] to the interjection of government-supported "public television" into journalism. The budget deficits are already sufficiently large, thanks to the selfless, unceasing efforts of those noble men now in Congress. But more importantly, there can be no justification for funding thru taxation of a "journalism" venture which is nowhere answerable in the marketplace. The Third Reich had Dr. Joseph Goebbels; there is no need for that here.

Comment: Government-supported public TV has already interjected itself into news and public affairs programming. But the results have been unsatisfactory; owing at least partly to the requirement that every year public TV goes on bended knee to the government asking for more funds. Now there is a move to set up a system of funding that would guarantee financing for public TV even if the programs at times offend those noble men in Congress of whom you speak. This move has met noble opposition because the politicians will not gladly relinquish their power of censorship by intimidation. Now [getting to the column that prompted your letter] the White House Office of Telecommunications suggests the issue be settled by removing news and public affairs programming from public TV. This suggestion can be most charitably regarded as a copout. Less charitably, I regard it as an effort to retain government control over public TV program content; Doctor Goebbels would be pleased.

HOSMER T. MERRELL: A lot is said about the annoyance of the laugh track, and I would agree that it is annoying. But I like the show All in the Family, which they say is presented before a live audience, and that isn't much better. I would like the show better without all that racket. Why can't it at least be more subdued? They still laugh on *every* line.

Comment: Altho no broadcaster will admit it, a few of us suspicious types believe that the live laughs are sometimes augmented by machine. One producer has said, however, that now and then a scene would have to be retaped for one reason or another after the live audience went home, and then he'd add some mechanical laughter rather than inflict a sudden and inexplicable silence upon the viewer's consciousness.

MRS. GEORGE GIROUX: I am writing this letter to protest the rescheduling of Sesame Street from 3:30 to 5:30 p. m. About a week ago I called station WTTW to register my complaint. I wish you could have seen the disappointment on the faces of my two pre-schoolers when they discovered it was no longer on at 3:30, and I am quite sure they are not the only children who feel this way. With the current scheduling, we have two choices: [1] Keep the television off and miss Sesame Street, or [2] Have Sesame Street on as we eat dinner. If we follow the first, there are tears because the children miss the program; if we follow the second, they do not eat dinner because they are so engrossed in the program.

Comment: Yours is by no means the only objection to this change, one of many schedule changes WTTW has made in recent weeks. It appears to be the single mistake they made, and if protests continue, I suspect they will fix it.

NAME WITHHELD: It occurred to me while reading your column on Dan Rather's conversation with President Nixon that critics reserve the prerogative of criticism for themselves. Any layman entering the act is considered a maniac, especially someone who loves his country. There seems to be great rejoicing if a reporter asks belligerent questions of a public official or slips him an embarrassing question. I'm glad you were pleased with Dan Rather. I was pleased with President Nixon.

Comment: So was I, and I am especially pleased that my mail has been running two to one in Rather's favor. Perhaps it shows that many viewers have come to respect the President enough to believe that he can stand up to the difficult and meaningful questions a good reporter asks. Would that someone had asked Paul Powell a few tough questions before he died.

MRS. KATE FLYNN: We are very disappointed by the language used by Archie Bunker in All in the Family. There was a time when words like "hell" were forbidden on the air, but Archie uses them freely. Also Archie and his son in law, Mike, bring in quotations from the Bible, which are used irreverently. Can anything be done to make this show wholesome for family viewing?

Comment: Yes, and you can do it yourself by discussing with your children the language used and the attitudes portrayed on the program, thus preparing them for a world in which they will encounter Archies and Mikes at every turn.

JOHANNA FABKE: I think you are a good critic—a genuine rather than a "so-called" liberal—but I'd advise you to stick to your column and forget about talk shows. I heard part of Roy Leonard's radio interview with you and cringed.

Comment: Gee, and that was my best one. After I went on The Dan Price Show, The Marty Faye Show, The Chicago Show, The Sig Sakowicz Show, The Chicago Show, and Nightline, people were taken ill all over Chicago. So I quit doing it.

Clarence Petersen